



Requirements for building a house or addition, or for finishing off space



Your guide to the permit and inspection process

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When is a permit required for residential property?

The Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code requires a building permit for any house, addition or work to finish off existing space. It states any work that is *structural* in nature requires a permit. It does exclude cosmetic changes such as painting, installing vinyl siding, replacing carpet, etc, and “ordinary” repairs such as replacing cabinetry, kitchen appliances (except gas equipment), electrical switches, electric water heaters, reroofing, etc. Call the Building Inspection office if you are in doubt.

What is the process?

The process is simple but requires some coordination:

1. When considering where to place your structure on the lot, contact the Planning Administrator (375-3036) for setback and easement requirements.

2. Gather all of the necessary documents.



3. Complete the permit application(s), submit the construction documents and pay the required fees.



4. Wait for the permit to be issued.



5. Start construction.

6. Call for the required inspections.



What documents do I need?

New house or addition



1. **Plot plan** — showing the proposed distances of the structure to all property lines. A survey plat or a legible drawing showing the structure's footprint with relation to the property lines is acceptable.
2. **Construction drawings** — two hard copies and a electronic set are required, including:
 - ✓ Engineered soil report showing shrink-swell potential.
 - ✓ Elevations
 - ✓ Footing and foundation plan
 - ✓ Floor plan(s)
 - ✓ Roof plan
 - ✓ Truss layout plan and detail sheets (if trussed)
 - ✓ Floor joist layout
 - ✓ Section through house or addition
- ✓ Details of construction

Finishing off existing space

1. **Scope of work statement** — required so planreviewer and inspector can differentiate between what is existing work and what is new work.
2. **Construction drawings** — required if the work involves new walls, or structural modifications.



Notes for residential work:

- ✓ The Virginia Residential Code is the applicable building code for the Commonwealth of Virginia. Copies of the code are available in the library.
- ✓ Drawings may be prepared by the homeowner or contractor. For most new single-family dwellings and additions, a registered architect or professional engineer is recommended.
- ✓ The Building Inspection plan reviewer will perform a check of the plans to verify structural integrity and code compliance. If the documents are incorrect or need further information, the plans will be returned to the submitter for corrections and re-submittal.
- ✓ Do I have to bring the whole building up to code if I do nonrelated work elsewhere in the house?
No. Only those portions of the work under the permit must be built to the current code.

Who can apply for the permit?

The homeowner or contractor who is going to do the work can apply for the applicable building or trade permit(s).





What permits do I need?

The following permits may be required for a new house:

- ✓ Building permit
- ✓ Electrical permit
- ✓ Mechanical permit
- ✓ Plumbing permit
- ✓ Gas permit (if applicable)

For additions and when finishing off existing space, the permits listed above may be required depending on the specific work.

What are the fees for the permits?

Inquiries about permit fees may be obtained by calling the Building Inspection Department and fees are subject to annual change.

How long does it take to get the permit?

The permitting process requires the approval of the:

- Building Department
- Zoning Administrator

We will make every attempt to have plans reviewed 10-15 days if we do not find many code violations. When your construction documents are in order and you have received approval from all of these departments, a building permit and one set of **Approved Field Plans**, you may pick them up at the Building Inspection Department.



How do I make changes to the plans during the construction phase?

During the course of construction, you may find it necessary to change your plans. There are two different processes to get this accomplished:

- An **amendment** is required if your change affects any of the departments besides the Building Inspection Department. Examples of such work include changing the size of the house or changing the footprint of the building.
- A **structural revision** is required even if the work does not impact any other department. The typical process requires the applicant to submit the **revision back to the Building Inspection office for review before any work on revision is done**. Examples of such work include changing structural materials, changing room layout, or adding a closet.



Why do I need a soil report?

The quality of soil in the City of Salem varies by location, and certain areas are prone to differential settlement, meaning that the footings may be subject to inconsistent bearing. In order to determine if your site has this potential for “shrink-swell”, a soil report is required for all new houses in the city. If you are constructing an addition with habitable space, you are also required to have a soil report. In order to have a shrink-swell test, you can hire a soil scientist or engineer to perform that service. If the soil analysis results from moderate to very high shrink-swell potential, an engineered footing will be required.



What inspections are required?

The following inspections are typically required for new homes, additions, conversions and finishing off space depending on the scope of work and specific construction details.

- ✓ Footing inspection – rebar will need to be on chairs
- ✓ Foundation inspection – after backfilling of crawl space
- ✓ Poured walls – after installation of rebars, but prior to pouring concrete
- ✓ Slab inspection – prior to pouring concrete for basement or garage floor
- ✓ Drainage/waterproofing – prior to backfilling foundation
- ✓ Rough electrical – after all wires are pulled
- ✓ Rough mechanical – after all ductwork is installed
- ✓ Rough gas – after all gas piping is installed
- ✓ Rough plumbing – after all plumbing lines are installed
- ✓ Framing inspection – after all of the trades have approved rough-ins, but prior to insulating or covering the walls
- ✓ Insulation inspection – after the framing inspection
- ✓ Final electrical – after all electrical work is completed
- ✓ Final mechanical – after all mechanical work is completed
- ✓ Final gas – after all gas work is completed
- ✓ Final plumbing – after all plumbing work is completed
- ✓ Final building inspection – after all trades are completed and lot is graded
- ✓ Final inspection(s) by applicable city departments.

It is the responsibility of the permit holder to be sure the **Approved Field Set** of plans are available at all times during the construction.



How do I get an inspection scheduled?

Call (540) 375-3036 and request an inspection.

When can I move in?

For a new house, once you have obtained an approved final building inspection and approvals from all applicable city departments, you will be issued a Certificate of Occupancy (CO) and will be allowed to move in.

For additions and finishing off space, the homeowner will be allowed to move into the space after all of the final inspections are completed.



Prior to digging call

Miss Utility — Dial 811

Miss Utility is a free service that will locate all member utilities that may have facilities in your proposed area of excavation. Notification must be made a minimum of 48 hours prior to any excavating.